

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1 – 39. (canceled)

40.(previously presented) A method for detecting a target nucleic acid in a sample comprising:

(a) contacting the nucleic acid with a circular oligonucleotide probe under conditions that allow hybridization between complementary sequences in the target nucleic acid and the circular oligonucleotide probe;

(b) adding an oligonucleotide primer pair comprising a first primer and a second primer; wherein

(i) the first primer of the pair comprises (A) a first sequence that is complementary to the circular probe, (B) a second sequence that is complementary to the second primer of the pair, and (C) a signal generating moiety;

(ii) the second primer of the pair comprises (A) a sequence that is complementary to the first primer and (B) a moiety capable of quenching, masking or inhibiting the activity of the signal generating moiety when located adjacent to, or in close proximity to the signal generating moiety; and

(iii) when the first primer and the second primer are bound to one another, the signal is inhibited;

(c) adding a DNA polymerase; and

(d) amplifying the circular probe and separating the signal generating moiety and the quenching, masking or inhibitory moiety, thereby generating a signal, wherein detection thereof indicates the presence of the target nucleic acid in the sample.

41.(previously presented) The method of claim 40, whereby the circular oligonucleotide probe is formed by ligating the 3' and 5' ends of a linear oligonucleotide probe, comprising 3' and 5' regions complementary to adjacent sequences in the target nucleic acid under conditions that allow hybridization between complementary sequences in the target nucleic acid and the linear oligonucleotide probe.

42.(previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the signal generating moiety is a fluorescent agent.

43.(previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the signal generating moiety is a chemiluminescent agent.

44.(previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the signal generating moiety is an enzyme or enzyme substrate.

45.(currently amended) The method of claim 40, wherein the circular probe is amplified using an amplification method selected from the group consisting of polymerase chain reaction, strand displacement amplification, transcription mediated amplification, ramification-extension amplification method (RAM) ~~RAM~~ and primer extension.

46.(currently amended) The method of claim 45, wherein the amplification method is ramification-extension amplification method (RAM) ~~RAM~~.

47.(currently amended) A method for detecting a target nucleic acid in a sample comprising:

(a) contacting the nucleic acid with an oligonucleotide primer pair comprising a first primer and a second primer under conditions that allow hybridization between complementary sequences in the target nucleic acid and the oligonucleotide primer pair; wherein

~~(b) adding the oligonucleotide primer pair comprising a first primer and a second primer; wherein~~

(i) the first primer of the pair comprises (A) a first sequence that is complementary to the target nucleic acid, (B) a second sequence that is complementary to the second primer of the pair, and (C) a signal generating moiety;

(ii) the second primer of the pair comprises (A) a sequence that is complementary to the first primer and (B) a moiety capable of quenching, masking or inhibiting the activity of the signal generating moiety when located adjacent to, or in close proximity to the signal generating moiety; and

(iii) when the first primer and the second primer are bound to one another, the signal is inhibited;

(e) (b) adding a single stranded oligonucleotide primer comprising sequences complementary to the target nucleic acid;

(d) (c) adding a DNA polymerase; and

(e) (d) amplifying the target nucleic acid and separating the signal generating moiety and the quenching, masking or inhibitory moiety, thereby generating a signal, wherein detection thereof indicates the presence of the target nucleic acid in the sample.

48.(previously presented) The method of claim 47, wherein the signal generating moiety is a fluorescent agent.

49.(previously presented) The method of claim 47, wherein the signal generating moiety is a chemiluminescent agent.

50.(previously presented) The method of claim 47, wherein the signal generating moiety is an enzyme or enzyme substrate.

51.(currently amended) The method of claim 47, wherein the target nucleic acid is amplified using an amplification method selected from the group consisting of polymerase chain reaction, strand displacement amplification, transcription mediated amplification, ramification-extension amplification method (RAM) and primer extension.

52.(previously presented) The method of claim 51, wherein the amplification method is polymerase chain reaction.